

UN Initiative on Greening Procurement in the Health Sector from Products to Services



Landscape Analysis for the Technical Consultation, Bonn: 29-30 August 2013



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Lead writers for this project were: Megha Rathi, Susan Wilburn, Volker Welter, and Carlos Dora of WHO. Key contributions were made by all agencies involved including the following members of the Interagency Task Team: Mirjana Milic and Yasna Singh, UNDP; Jacob Kurian, UNEP; Helene Moller and Francisco Blanco, UNICEF; Morten Sorensen and Ignacio Diaz, UNFPA; Alexander Blecken and Nives Costa, UNOPS; Francois Jorda, Bettina Menne and Francesca Racioppi, WHO.

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Copy editor

Vallaurie Crawford

Production editor

Elaine Ruth Fletcher, WHO

Graphic design

Edward Cobos, Punto Grafico

Proofreading and production support

Ariel Charney, Madeleine Pawlowski, and Maxwell Tucker

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Top photo: A new generation of battery-free solar vaccine refrigerators being used at a hospital in Vietnam. The device uses "direct drive" refrigeration to store excess solar energy in ice or cold-packs during night time and cloudy days. (Photo credit: Project Optimize/PATH/Hai Le)

Bottom left: Poor procurement procedures may lead to excessive stockpiling of pharmaceuticals, and then disposal into the environment. This adds to risks of pharmaceutical contamination of environments both during production and disposal phases, which can cause ecological damage; more research is needed to determine the extent of long-term effects on the environment and human health. (Photo credit: e-MagineArt.com)

Bottom centre: A syringe and needle. Sharps not only require careful handling but also special measures for waste disinfection and disposal. Improperly disposed syringes and needles can create risks of infection for landfill scavengers. (Photo credit: ZaldyIm/Flickr)

Bottom right: A sample being examined under a microscope. (Photo credit: © Geoff Whiteway/Flickr)

Disclaimer: The procurement data in the report are approximate figures and may not represent exact quantities or costs. Graphs and charts portraying the procurement data shared in the report should not be reproduced without prior approval by the respective agencies.

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Executive Summary

In the RIO+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, world leaders renewed their commitment to advancing sustainable development, and further re-affirmed that its enactment is the only viable solution for addressing the world's growing environmental, social and economic problems. This call for increased accountability for sustainable development was also extended to include the international development sector and UN system, the latter being seen as vital to the credibility of the UN in facilitating related efforts to promote sustainable development in countries and regions.

Public procurement activities have been seen as a key entry point and a vehicle to promote sustainable development practices. The Sustainable UN (SUN) programme developed various guidelines and tools to support activities that include UN system procurement initiatives. As this guidance has not extended to the procurement of health products and services, the UN agencies addressed the gap and constituted the informal Inter-Agency Task Team for Sustainable Procurement in the Health Sector. The approach builds upon the principle that the UN system should lead by example in terms of operationalizing environmental and social sustainability principles into its own practices. UN health sector procurement is a large market-shaping model with approximately US\$ 3 billion in procurement annually.

The linkage between health sector procurement and the environment has not been well understood in spite of the fact that procurement activities in the health sector have a number of important associated environmental issues including a significant carbon footprint. Studies in England show that the National Health Service contributes approximately 25% of public-sector greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, while research in the United States of America shows that 8% of total GHG emissions come from the health sector. In addition to greenhouse gas emissions, the health sector contributes environmental health impacts from the procurement, use and disposal of products used. These include hazardous drugs, chemicals, radiation, environmental and infectious hazards, air and water pollution, and risks from inappropriate health-care waste disposal and incineration practices. Within the health sector, procurement (goods and services) is one of the largest GHG contributors.

This background paper was developed to support a technical consultation on greening health sector procurement. Section I provides general information about the technical consultation and the UN procurement processes. Section II focuses on procurement in the health sector, including tools and examples of green procurement strategies adopted by the health sector.

Chapter 1 provides background about health sector procurement and its impact on the environment, as well as about initiatives and potential growth opportunities for green procurement in the health sector. Chapter 2 details the history, purpose and goals of the informal Inter-Agency Task Team for Sustainable Procurement in the Health Sector, and Chapter 3 describes the goals and objectives of the Technical Consultation that was held on 29-30 August 2013. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the procurement processes of UN agencies; Chapter 5 describes the UN Sustainable Procurement guidance documents developed by the Sustainable UN initiative.

Section II describes the history of and trends in green procurement in Chapter 6, an overview of UN health sector procurement in Chapter 7, and examples of tools for green procurement in the health sector in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 outlines potential interventions in each stage of the procurement process. One outcome of the technical consultation is to determine the feasibility of producing WHO Guidelines for green procurement of health products and services, so the process of WHO Guideline Development is described in Chapter 10. Chapter 11 discusses governance and strategic influences and challenges that relate to green procurement.



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